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## EDUCATIONAL COOPERATION OF PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN THE TARNÓW COUNTY WITH THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

### Abstract

While the main goal of the primary school is to educate, the school's cooperation with the local community and the pupils' families goes beyond the realization of its educational role. The establishment of a working relationship between these three key institutions of social life can foster proper personal development of children who are raised in such an environment. That process can in turn result in better educational attainment of those children. If a well-educated person (not necessarily in the academic sense) is greatly valued in any kind of society, his/her status is even higher in the modern, knowledge-based world. Based on a research project in the Tarnów county in southern Poland, this article attempts to examine various aspects of the interaction between school and the local community.

**Key words:** primary school / local community / family cooperation, goals and effects, the educational function, social integration, development of the child's personality

### INTRODUCTION

Teachers' knowledge about communication and cooperation in education, which is a conversation about a human being, has its basis in the humanistic approach. Humanistic theory assumes that a person's ability to study is a natural propensity, that students can think and learn for themselves and that each person is a creative entity. One learns through experience and learning is most effective when both one's mind and one's emotions are involved. Self-evaluation is a key aspect of this kind of learning and the discipline needed to achieve its aim is self-discipline. A pupil who sets off on his learning journey is influenced not only by his teachers but also by the local environment whose basic duty is to guarantee his or her safety. Moreover, he has the right to have his needs as well as his individual capabilities and interests respected or at

least acknowledged.<sup>1</sup> The humanistic orientation in education advocates the extension of a synergic school/parents communication to the local community, the teachers' natural partner in the educational process. Synergy brings together and connects the operations of various agents in a way that is more effective and efficient than mere adding up of their separate actions.<sup>2</sup> An eye for synergies is what characterizes modern education at all levels. A synergic relationship is multilateral; it involves the educational establishment and the local community; it thrives through dialogue. The locals may speak with more than one voice, and though some or even all of these voices may have no direct connection to what goes on in school, the very existence of a community (be it uniform or divided) influences the learning process, if only indirectly.

### THE ROLE OF DIDACTICS IN THE MODERN PRIMARY SCHOOL

From the modern perspective interaction holds the key to the student's progress in each and every way, from knowledge acquisition to upbringing. Interaction is a most effective catalyst not only in the process of acquiring information and learning skills and habits, but also the development of cognitive interests, preparation for self-education and an appetite for the cognitive search. According to S. Palka, the latest tendencies in education are characterized by

- versatility, understanding, multilateralism, ie. qualities which are given great scope in the shaping of feelings and character.
- subjectivity expressed by conscious participation in reality and having an effect on it.<sup>3</sup> This requires the balancing of two planes — the plane of things and that of personality, objects and subjects. This balancing necessitates the treatment of students as subjects who experience the world and themselves in it, and who try to identify and understand objects and people and themselves as entities with a sense of causal power in relation to each other and the environment.<sup>4</sup>
- partnership (as defined by J. Grochulska). School education needs both compulsion and freedom. Freedom must not end up in licence and compulsion in tyranny and enslavement. Whereas the behavioural strategy is inclined towards compulsion and manipulation, the humanistic strategy runs the risk of giving the child more freedom than he/she needs. The best solution is to avoid extremes, ie. adopt a golden mean approach. The form and timing of such a balancing act will depend primarily on the teacher.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Psychologia humanistyczna a wychowanie*, ed. M. Sobocki, Wyd. Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, Lublin 1994; and C.R. Rogers, *Terapia nastawiona na klienta. Grupy spotkaniowe*, Thesaurus-Press, Wrocław 1991.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. W. Kopaliński, *Słownik wyrazów obcych i zwrotów obcojęzycznych*, Wyd. Wiedza Powszechna, Warszawa 1989, p. 492.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. S. Palka, *Pedagogika w stanie tworzenia. Kontynuacje*, Wyd. Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków 2003, p. 119.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. E. Piotrowski, "Podmiotowość ucznia w kształceniu integralnym", [In:] ed. K. Denek, F. Bereźnicki, J. Świrko-Filipczuk, *Przemiany dydaktyki na progu XXI wieku*, Agencja Wydawnicza Kwadra, Szczecin 2000, pp. 118–119.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. J. Grochulska, "Uczyć kierowania własnym losem", [In:] *Pomiędzy wolnością a przymusem. W poszukiwaniu złotego środka w edukacji*, red. J. Grochulska, Vol. II, Agencja Wydawnicza Kwadra, Szczecin 2000, pp. 118–119.

- dialogue. It is founded on the ability to communicate and the ability to listen as well.
- creativity. Here it means learning through actions, encouraging and putting a premium on innovation, being ready to go beyond the letter of the curriculum.
- independence. Today it is manifested in the ability to find whatever information is needed on one's own and processing it correctly.<sup>6</sup> An important part of this process is the critical analysis of information and its provenance. The ability to source, manage and assess information (and to cut through loads of rubbish and spam) also realizes the goal of self-education.
- individualization of education.
- democracy and inner-directedness. Inculcation of those values should prepare the pupils for engagement in the creation of a better world, ie. a democratic and self-governing society.<sup>7</sup>
- tolerance. This value has a special meaning in the democratic system. In the words of J. Górniewicz, one should accept the great diversity of humankind and not only learn to cherish one's own distinctness but also insist that one's own rights and privileges be respected.<sup>8</sup>

In order to further all those goals the modern school interacts through cooperation and dialogue with local community. The most obvious objective of such collaboration is to broaden the school's didactic mission and to improve the efficiency of the education processes. But the outreach has also other spinoff effects, chief among them the creation of better conditions for an all-round development of the pupils' personalities. A working school/ local community partnership may affect and stimulate — in less palpable ways — the pupils' cognitive potential, their ability to solve problems, search and select information, and use the newly acquired knowledge in practice.<sup>9</sup>

It is hard to imagine a well-functioning partnership between the school and the local community that would not be based on the maintenance of lines of communication between the two parties, mutual acceptance of the form of negotiating collaborative projects, an awareness of constraints which any party has to face even if its commitment remains firm, patience and flexibility in dealing with limited commitments as long as they go in the right direction, a clear understanding of the mutual challenges, and a willingness to work towards the same goal. Both parts should bring trust and loyalty to the partnership.<sup>10</sup> If the cooperation is to include grass-root initiatives and genuine volunteers, its formula and content must not be dictated by the school authorities; indeed, it is the parents and representatives of local community who should have a greater say. But first of all, the latter should be able to discuss and join any collaborative project without being pushed or coerced by the other party. In the process of synergic communication dialogue is very important. To be effective the dialogue between teachers/school and the representatives of local community should embody or affirm the following characteristics:

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. S. Pałka, *Pedagogika...*, p. 119.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, s. 120.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. J. Górniewicz, *Kategorie pedagogiczne. Odpowiedzialność podmiotowość, samorealizacja, tolerancja, twórczość, wyobraźnia*, Wyd. Uniwersytetu Warmińsko-Mazurskiego, Olsztyn 2001, p. 60.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Ł. Reczek-Zymróz, *Współdziałanie pedagogiczne szkoły podstawowej ze środowiskiem lokalnym*, Wyd. Impuls, Kraków 2008.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. W. Okoń, *Nowy słownik pedagogiczny*, Wyd. Akademickie Żak, Warszawa 2007, p. 465.

- the discreteness of subjects. They are to operate in a dyad, ie. focus on cooperation to achieve a common objective.
- the openness/presence of subjects. That implies full involvement in the realization of a common goal, in this case facilitating the child's progress and development.
- the unity of activity and passivity of subjects. In other words each party should treat the other one as a human subject with a complex personality and motivation; their face-to-face interactions should make the exchange and clash of ideas more effective.
- directness. Clear and frank discussions deepen mutual understanding; while the use of specialist language muddies the waters and leads to misunderstandings.<sup>11</sup>
- equivalence and mutual respect. Partners should not only divide their duties equally and fairly but also jointly plan and take responsibility for tasks ahead.
- complexity. Here it means an all-round approach to tasks undertaken to assist the physical, psychological and emotional development of children and adolescents. Education, upbringing and care should not be treated in isolation but as a complex, integral whole.
- correlation of actions. If the original goals appear too disparate and narrow they should be merged and integrated into a system of actions forming a whole.
- authenticity. It guarantees the credibility of agreements and actions; its opposites are posturing and opportunistic short-termism.
- planning. It is clear, dispassionate thinking focused on the accomplishment of future outcomes that would benefit the parties in dialogue.
- regularity. Here it refers to the frequency, rhythm and smoothness of actions directed at the children.
- an innovative touch about the social and didactic actions undertaken by the partners.<sup>12</sup>

#### FORMS OF COOPERATION BETWEEN THE PRIMARY SCHOOL AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

The school — local community communication, or the flow of information between the teachers and the local representatives, can have various forms and use a variety of channels. They include:

- conversations and pedagogical consultations. The latter is a more formal occasion which demands a great deal of preparation on the part of the teachers. It may involve an in-depth discussion of the school's tasks and its didactic programme; teachers may use the meeting to give their opinion about the functioning of the school, voice their expectations, or comment on the latest pieces of legislation from the Sejm or the Ministry of Education.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. D. Waloszek, "Dialog jako sposób istnienia podmiotów w edukacji", [In:] *Przestrzeń i czas dialogu w edukacji*, ed. D. Waloszek, Centrum Edukacyjne Blżej Przedszkola, Kraków 2011, pp. 77–84.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. A. Jankowska, *Rozmowy z rodzicami. Poradnik dla rodziców*, Wydawnictwo Pedagogiczne ZNP, Kielce 2012; M. Łobocki, *Współdziałanie nauczycieli i rodziców w procesie wychowania*, Wyd. Nasza Księgarnia, Warszawa 1985; and M. Mendel, „Rodzice w szkole”, [In:] *Ku partnerstwu szkola-rodzice*, ed. J. Kropiwnicki, Wyd. Nauczycielskie, Jelenia Góra 1999.

- PTA meetings. This is the forum where all issues that in the triangle teachers — parents — pupils are raised.
- lectures/conferences. One should remember that the discussion topics should be chosen jointly by parents/representatives of local communities and the teachers.<sup>13</sup>
- letters or emails. Such messages, written with due attention to their form, should be respectful in tone. Their language should be clear and precise.
- telephone calls.<sup>14</sup>

Communication of the school with representatives of local community can also take place

- during visits in students' homes. The aim is for the teachers to get to know the student's living conditions and the atmosphere in his/her family.
- during community events. They offer a good opportunity for informal meetings (picnics, sport tournaments, matches) and discussions of many issues connected with child's functioning at school, usually in a friendly atmosphere.
- through open classes. They are a valuable addition to the more common forms of cooperation with representatives of local communities. It is worth organizing such classes occasionally at a time that is convenient for parents and other people that may wish to attend.
- during classes conducted jointly by teachers and guest speakers — representatives of various communities. A class of this kind affords the opportunity to get informed about certain issues from those that are directly affected by them.
- during club lessons after school. Such classes require careful preparation and a readiness to sacrifice their own time from those who would run them.
- during school excursions and daytrips. To those who have decided to join in, they offer a unique opportunity to communicate at leisure in informal circumstances. However, every outing requires a good deal of time and effort, the enlisting of the help of parents and other staff, etc. An outing is good for establishing closer interpersonal relations and integrating the group as it brings to light the individual temperaments and emotional reactions of the participants.
- by getting parents and other people (especially various handymen, but also sponsors) to help with redecoration, repairs and other odd jobs, or the purchase of items for the classroom. Apart from its practical value, this form of cooperation is an excellent illustration of the idea of school/local community cooperation.
- at charity events organized to help students and families in need. Such events unite the school and the local provide community round the realization of a specific task. They have a special role in the development of the pupils' moral character (they have to show sensitivity and empathy).
- through the organization of psychological and legal consultation sessions. They too have a special role in the process of communication; they show the practical application of the technique of problem solving in an area of common concern to some parents, teachers and members of the local community.

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. B. Lulek, *Współpraca szkoły, rodziny i środowiska*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Rzeszowskiego, Rzeszów 2008, pp. 169–170.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. I. Dzierżgowska, *Rodzice w szkole*, Wydawnictwo CODN, Warszawa 1999, pp. 86–102.

Regular exchange of information between school and local community contributes to:

- the consolidation of the school/parents/community cooperation and the streamlining of didactic and educational initiatives;
- raising the pedagogical awareness of parents and members of the local communities
- an expansion of the pedagogical know-how of parents and members of the local community;
- the involvement of parents and representatives of the local community in solving didactic and organizational problems of schools;<sup>15</sup>
- teachers getting better insight into their pupils' homes and families;
- the reduction of distance between teachers, parents and local community members that may result in establishing closer (more emotional) ties between them and in this way facilitate two-way communication and reciprocal understanding;
- the recruiting of devoted friends and supporters of the school among parents and representatives of the local community with a view of enriching classroom activities and adopting new educational and pedagogical methods for the benefit of students;<sup>16</sup>
- the dissemination of knowledge about children's development, upbringing and education;
- the organization of leisure activities for children;<sup>17</sup>
- the education of the general public about parents' and children's rights and duties;
- knowledge transfer about the situation of children in various social environments;<sup>18</sup>
- the improvement of the educational process and the sharing of information about current socio-cultural issues affecting the educational system;
- the utilization of efforts and resources of the local and broader environment in the school's educational and pedagogical work (eg. renting rooms and equipment, enlisting the help of specialist instructors, enlisting the patronage and sponsorship of high-profile institutions and societies).<sup>19</sup>

## THE RESEARCH CONCEPT

The main question raised in this study is the following: which of the communication strategies and practices in the school/local community relationship can best meet the educational requirements and challenges of the 21st century. To answer that question, which has both a more general and a practical side, I conducted a two-stage research project in selected primary schools of Tarnów and Tarnów County in Southern Poland.

In 2013 a total of 90 teachers (45 from the town and 45 from the country) took part in the survey. In this group of teachers there were 80 women and 10 men. Almost all of

<sup>15</sup> Cf. N. Grochowska, R. Gugnacka, *Ja jestem sobą i ty jesteś sobą*, Wyd. Seventh SEA, Warszawa 2001.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. M. Łobocki, *Współdziałanie...*, pp. 18–19.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. M. Babiuch, *Jak współpracować z rodzicami trudnych uczniów?*, WSiP, Warszawa 2003, p. 43.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. M. Mendel, *Rodzice i nauczyciele jako sprzymierzeńcy*, Wyd. Harmonia, Gdańsk 2007, pp. 55–56.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. M. Winiarski, *Współdziałanie szkoły i środowiska*, WUW, Warszawa 1992, p. 151.

the respondents had a master's degree (88 altogether), just two had a licentiate degree. In terms of the length of their employment they fell into four classes: 1 to 6 years of work — two persons; 7 to 14 years — 28; 15 to 20 years — 16; and more than 20 years on the job — 38. As many as 62 persons held teacher's certificate Grade A, fifteen had Grade B certificate (mian, while the remaining eight held certificate Grade C (the bottom rank on the promotion ladder). A total of 120 parents (60 from the town and 60 from the country) took part in the survey. In this group there were 102 women and 18 men. In terms of educational attainment, the group consisted of fifty university graduates, 44 persons with secondary education, twenty vocational school graduates and one person with a primary education. The biggest number of parents, 83 in all, had one child in primary school, 29 — two children, and two parents — three children in primary school.

A total of 100 teachers (50 from the town and 50 from the country) took part in the first round of the research project, conducted in 2006/2007. In that group of teachers there were 85 women and 15 men. A great majority of the respondents, 82 in all, had a master's degree, while only 18 teachers had a licentiate's degree. Classified in terms of their employment history, they fell into four groups: 19 respondents with 1 to 6 years of work; 24 respondents with 7 to 14 years of work; 27 respondents with 15 to 20 years of work; and again the largest group were more than 20 years on the job. A total of 200 parents (100 from the town and 100 from the country) took part in that survey. In this group there were 165 women and 35 men. In that number there were 44 university graduates, 101 persons with secondary education, fifty — with vocational diplomas, and five — with primary school certificates. The biggest group of parents, 129 in all, had one child in primary school, 62 — two children, and nine parents — three children in primary school.

The research (Table 1) indicates that no other form of school / local community communication is as popular as face-to-face contacts between teachers and parents. In the year 2006/2007 a total of 91 % of teachers declared that they relied on this form of communication with parents, and in the year 2013 that percentage rose to 95.5 %. What these figures indicate is that teachers find closer contact with the families of their pupils important. One can also note that schools communicate more often (in comparison with the situation a few years ago) with the authorities in charge of school supervision.

Recently there has been more cooperation between schools and community day care centres. It is a good tendency, although it indicates that care and some of the educational functions that have been regarded as a family concern are being taken over by other institutions that can count on the necessary funding. The growing role of the local communities in this field has provoked some debate, especially in a situation when schools are suffering from a chronic financial squeeze. Schools have also been expanding their cooperation with training and professional development centres. This shows that teachers see the need to improve and update their qualifications.

Another area of growth is cooperation with sport clubs. Although it is still on a low level, its steady rise may indicate teachers' greater awareness of the role of physical activity in the educational process. Schools also continue to cooperate with the local fire brigade. Firefighters are invited to primary schools not only in connection with their primary job but also to participate in various projects and activities. Meanwhile, contacts with wealthy business sponsors are rather rare. It need not be seen as a problem in that too close a relationship may produce negative consequences such as an exposure to (crypto) advertising. In fact, our survey shows that cooperation with big companies has



declined. Earlier, it seems, it was easier for such companies to extend their patronage over local schools. Nowadays, however, the relations are more distanced even though business is still tempting schools with numerous benefits. Finally, the survey shows that teachers with the longest employment history are most active in maintaining and expanding patterns of cooperation with the local community.

Table 1

Partners of primary school cooperation school in the local community

Partners of primary school cooperation school in the local community	Teachers 2006/7 N=100				Teachers 2013 N=90			
	town N=50	country N=50	total	%	town N=45	country N=45	total	%
a) parents	45	46	91	<b>91.0</b>	42	44	86	<b>95.5</b>
b) local authorities	15	23	38	<b>38.0</b>	28	34	62	<b>68.8</b>
c) police	23	23	46	<b>46.0</b>	19	25	44	<b>48.8</b>
d) specialized centers	41	23	64	<b>64.0</b>	24	33	57	<b>63.3</b>
e) fire brigade	11	7	18	<b>18.0</b>	12	20	32	<b>35.5</b>
f) sport clubs	3	3	6	<b>6.0</b>	10	11	21	<b>23.3</b>
g) societies	15	8	23	<b>23.0</b>	12	10	22	<b>24.4</b>
h) sponsors	21	19	40	<b>40.0</b>	13	14	27	<b>30.0</b>
i) companies	7	6	13	<b>13.0</b>	5	2	7	<b>7.7</b>
j) community day care centres	14	19	33	<b>23.0</b>	14	23	37	<b>41.1</b>
k) cultural institutions	31	24	55	<b>55.0</b>	24	31	55	<b>61.1</b>
l) training and professional development centres	2	0	2	<b>2.0</b>	27	28	55	<b>61.1</b>
m) other (which?)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

In parents' communication with the school the key role belongs to the class tutor, and it is his/her attitude that defines the effectiveness of these contacts. The 2006/2007 survey indicates that 79.5% parents (ie. 159 out of 200 respondents) were in touch with the class tutor, while in the 2013 survey the figures went up to 93%, or 112 out of 120 respondents. Clearly, there is a tendency for the role of the class tutor to become even more important. Parents' contacts with teachers of individual subjects are by far less common. In 2006/2007 41 parents (out of 200 respondents), ie. 20.5%, made such a contact, in 2013 it was only 20 (out of 120), or 16.6%. Contacts with head teachers, school counsellors and other people working at school were very rare.

The survey also asked about the frequency of contacts with school. The biggest group of parents got in touch with school a few times during the year, mainly at parent — teacher meetings [in 2006/2007 — 79 (39.5%) out of 200 respondents, in 2013 — 77 (64.1%) out of 120]. That is another clear sign that parents' contacts with school are on the rise. A minority of respondents contact with a school quite often [2006/2007



there were 73 of them (36%), in 2013 — 27 (30%)]. The data implies that the number of parents who have frequent contacts with school remained on the same level. And, the results of our research show, respondents from rural areas are more active in communicating with school than parents from town.

Another problem in the research project dealt with teachers' communication about their pupil's education with their partners outside school. The survey indicates that a vast majority of teachers, a total of 77 (85.5%) out of 90 (38 respondents from town and 39 from the country) made such contacts. Only 13 (14.4%) teachers (7 from town and 6 from the country) did not try to make such contacts. According to 2006/2007 research 94 (94%) teachers (out of a group of 100) declared their agreement with the statement that dialogue is important in education. The slight drop in the approval vote is probably of no consequence, but it may show a trend making itself felt in schools.

The issue was explored further through questions about the subject (thematic range) of this type of communication. The results are shown in Table 2.

The results of both editions of the survey indicate that when teachers talked to representatives of the local community, it was mainly about the organization of excursions, daytrips, school and class events. Quite often these exchanges were connected with the organization of club activities and pupils' preparation for competitions. Worth noting was a growing demand for consultations with specialists. It may be caused by a larger amount of didactic and behavioural problems in the classroom and by teachers' need for improving their qualifications. Another cause of concern is the significant decrease in the exchange of information during open classes. A comparative analysis of the survey data shows there was no difference in answers of respondent from town and from the country. Most active in this form communication with the local community were teachers holding a master's degree and professional certificates Class A, and working for over twenty years at school.

Parents were asked the same question. In the group of 120 parents (2013) the majority communicated with school [81 (67.5%) from town and 40 from the country], but 39 (32.5%), which included 19 respondents from town and 20 from the country saw no need for such communication. The research conducted in 2006/2007 shows that 83.5 % of respondents (167 out of 200) participated in this form of exchange of information. The differences are not significant, but they confirm the findings obtained in the teachers' group. The number of parents who did not communicate with school about their children's education was low, especially when the school in question made an effort to appear open, flexible, and intent on consensual solutions.

The research results concerning the themes (subjects) of the communication between parents and school are presented in Table 2. Top of list is the subject of parents' concern over their children's homework. The 2013 survey notes a considerable growth of interest on the part of the parents in the organization of school events, excursions and daytrips (in comparison with the findings of 2006/2007). The interest in school clubs, students' preparation for competitions and open class initiatives remained low. Parents with secondary and higher education who had one child at school were the most active. But we can also observe a rise of interest in the educational function of school among parents who live in the country. This trend may be caused by such factors as the growing number of people with high and secondary education who live in the country and a greater involvement of small communities in school life, especially as more responsibility for schools is being devolved to the local level.





When the results obtained from the two groups of respondents are compared, the conclusions are clear. In the educational sphere the parent-teacher communication and cooperation is chiefly focused on the planning of excursions and daytrips, but seldom extends to activities like open classes organized at school. By and large this selective preference is shared by both parents and many schools. The latter seem to cling to the belief that the local community will only be interested in some of the school initiatives and not in others.

The research data into the goals of communication in Table 3 indicates that better grades and the development of the children's interests and talents are always treated with great seriousness. Especially teachers, as the 2013 survey shows, cared a great deal about their pupils' progress and achievements. Yet the theme of primary school education as a springboard of further educational attainment was the least chosen option among the list of goals of communication between school and the local community. What is more, this order of preference did not depend on the respondents' place of residence. For the parents, their children's results — expressed in grades — are also a priority, but there is hardly any sign of an upswing in this part of the survey tables. Although it is important to motivate children to study, the acquisition of knowledge enabling further education and the elimination of failure at school seems to be of least importance to the respondents. On the whole, the results of this segment of the research project show little difference between responses from the urban and the rural areas.

A comparison of the responses obtained gained from both groups of respondents indicates that communication on the subject of pupils' education is mainly concerned with immediate or short-term results. Only few respondents see the child's performance and successes in the primary school in a wider, long-term perspective.

In the following section respondents were asked to assess various forms of communication between school and the local community. The findings are shown in Table 4.

For teachers the main forms of communication with local communities are one-to-one meetings and the organization of excursions and daytrips. However, the research results of 2013 indicate that parent-teacher meetings, traditionally the meeting place of the two parties, was making a comeback. Teachers find such periodical gatherings both economical and effective (though not all parents share this opinion): at a general meeting they are able to pass on whatever needs to be communicated to all the parents at the same time. Meanwhile open classes and lectures seem to be have been losing ground. As the surveys show they ceased to be an attractive form of communication between school and the local community. Group consultations and training courses were in decline either, even though they are interesting alternative to parent-teacher meetings. The fact that their number decline may have something to do with the amount of time and effort necessary to prepare them. Whereas the organization of school excursions and daytrips remained firm on the agenda, open classes were in retreat. Yet the importance of the latter should not be underestimated as they show best to the invited guests the teacher's everyday work with children. The relative lack of interest in lectures may result from a traditional way of their organization. However, it needs to be said in their defence that they can be a valuable and memorable source of information. That is why none of these, lately less popular, forms of communication should be given up; perhaps one should think of finding for them a new, more attractive formula. The parents on the



Table 5  
Teachers' and parents' assessment of the effects of communication/cooperation between school and the local communities in the education process

Assessment of the effects of education	points	Teachers 2006/7 N=94			Parents 2006/7 N=167			Teachers 2013 N=77			Parents 2013 N=81		
		town N=49	country N=45	total	town N=90	country N=77	total	town N=38	country N=39	total	town N=40	country N=41	total
very high	5	4	1	5	22	13	35	3	5	8	5	6	11
rather high	4	26	30	56	51	45	96	20	27	47	22	26	48
average	3	19	14	33	16	19	35	15	7	22	10	8	18
rather low	2	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	2	2	4
very low	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
arithmetic mean		<b>3.69</b>	<b>3.71</b>	<b>3.7</b>	<b>4.04</b>	<b>3.92</b>	<b>4.29</b>	<b>3.68</b>	<b>3.94</b>	<b>3.81</b>	<b>3.76</b>	<b>3.85</b>	<b>3.81</b>





whole confirm the teacher's views with regard to the forms of communication discussed here. Finally, there is no difference between responses from the urban and the rural areas.

To find out how the effects of the cooperation in the area of education are evaluated, I have constructed two questionnaires, one scaling responses along a balanced five-point rating scale (Table 5) and the other which involved ticking off concrete, named effects from a list (Table 6). Replies to the first questionnaire show that the vast majority of teachers have a high opinion of the effects of school — local community cooperation. This is confirmed by the arithmetic mean of the data, 3.7 for the 2006/2007 results and 3.81 for the ones from 2013. The mean value rose slightly (0.11%) between the first and the second round of the survey. One can notice a slight growth of effects of taken actions. There is no difference between responses from the urban and the rural areas.

The parents' opinion of the effects of cooperation between school and the local community changed between 2006/2007 and 2013. While the majority of parents valued the effects quite high in the earlier poll, the number of top and high ratings melted down in the 2013 round. This is reflected in the plunge of the arithmetical mean from 4.29 in the 2006/2007 sample to just 3.81 in the one from 2013. It is clear that some parents grew more critical (or less enthusiastic) about the effects of the cooperation between school and the local community. The 2006/2007 survey shows that teachers with the longest employment history, i.e. over 20 years, had a more positive opinion about the effects in question and that there was no difference between responses from the urban and the rural areas. The 2013 survey suggests that teachers and parents from the country (whose responses translate into the arithmetic mean of 3.84 and 3.85 respectively) value the effects of mutual contacts higher than the townies.

Faced with a list of specific effects (Table 6) the teachers in the survey pointed to pupils' good progress (reflected in better grades) as the prime touchstone and proof of the school doing a good job. This seems to be an article of faith with teachers, something that does not change with time. Teachers and students are also prone to make a connection between an increase in the number of pupils entering competitions and winning prizes (whenever the numbers do rise) and the school's good relations with the local community. Yet tests and final tests are not seen in this way. In the survey they were ranked low, probably on the grounds that real education, like genuine knowledge or true understanding, can hardly be measured by standardized test-scores. However, that somewhat haughty view of tests and exams (treated without distinction) prevents many people, not just a good many of our respondents, from treating them as helpful indicators of one's ability to cope with a series of challenges extending far into the future. This does not mean that discussions about the role of school in preparing today's pupils for future challenges have run out of steam. The debate goes on amid a chorus of complaints that too much emphasis is still put on encyclopedic knowledge rather than abstract thinking, problem-solving and creativity.

The parents questioned about specific effects of the school — local community cooperation by and large concurred with the opinions of the teachers. However, the 2013 survey found the two groups out of step for the first time: the parents singled out the option 'better results in the final tests' as a positive effect of cooperation. This acknowledgement was not extended on awards and honours won by teachers and pupils in various competitions, barring one or two exceptions. Yet at the same time more





parents were ready to admit ‘contacts with specialists from specialized centres’ into the range of positive effects of cooperation. .

Finally I asked teachers and parents about the factors which in their opinion facilitated and hampered proper communication between school and the local community. The findings are shown in Table 7 and Table 8 respectively.

Teachers who were asked about what facilitated the cooperation in the area of education said that it was the teacher who had a key role in communication with the local community. The pupils’ attitude (enabling a dialogue) and the initiative of both sides was also found very important. The teachers also pointed to the influence of previous experiences in this area on the level of communication with the local community. The survey suggests that the role of school authorities in initiating dialogue between school and community was declining. Finally, many respondents thought that financial resources were not a significant factor in the creation of good relations with the local community.

The parents in the survey more or less agreed with teachers’ opinions with the exception of one issue. They said they would not support the initiative launched by the authorities about a new dialogue between a family and a school. In comparison with the results from 2006/2007 the 2013 survey registered a growing role of the ‘child’s attitude’ in initiating a dialogue with school. It is also worth noting that generally for the respondents money seems to have been of little importance.

According to the teachers, chief among the factors which hindered the proper working of a partnership were the uncooperative attitude of the representatives of the local community and the indifference of parents who failed to keep in touch with their school (Table 8). Another factor mentioned by the teachers was the negative influence of excessively introverted children. What the survey had say about the insufficient funding of the communication between school and the local community confirms the general opinion about the skimpiness of the central budget with respect of education. And it should come as no surprise that teachers paid far more attention to the funding problems than the parents.

From the perspective of parents it was the ill-mannered teachers who were to blame for the hitches in communication between school and the local community. The parents, on the other hand, completely ignored their failure to keep up contact with their child’s school, which the teachers identified as the major snag in the relations. Finally, respondents in the 2013 survey did not point as often to the introverted child as a source of problem in their relations with school.

## CONCLUSIONS

My conclusion can be summed up in the following points:

- Parents are school’s main partners in the process of education on the level of primary school.
- Parents usually communicate with their school through the class tutor, who is the most important person in the parent-teacher relationship.
- Parents’ contacts with school as a rule do not go beyond a few meetings a year.
- Over the period of seven years (ie. the time between the two rounds of this survey) teachers became more involved in cooperation with parents in matters connected

with education, while, according to parents, there was an increase in the exchange of information about children's education.

- The favourite subject of communication between school and the local community is the organization of excursions and school events organization; open classes and lectures are the least popular.
- The main goal of the information exchange between school and representatives of the local community is to make sure that pupils would improve their performance and get better grades. The respondents are rarely concerned with their children's success in the long run.
- The most popular forms of communication are one-to-one meetings, organization of excursions and daytrips, and parent-teacher meetings.
- The effects of cooperation with respect to pupils' education are assessed rather highly by the respondents; lately, however, the teachers' ratings have been slipping while the parents' ratings have been up.
- The exchange of information in the sphere of education is greatly facilitated by an attitude of openness on the part of teachers and pupils. The teachers insist that the uncooperativeness of some sections of the local community and the failure of some parents to keep in touch on a regular basis are the main obstacles to good partnership. For parents it is the uncivil teachers who are to blame for hampering the communication between school and the local community.

*Łucja Reczek-Zymróż*

## EDUCATIONAL COOPERATION OF PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN THE TARNÓW COUNTY WITH THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

### Summary

The article is an examination of the recent trend to establish and expand various forms of cooperation between schools, the local community and the students' families. It is believed that properly built connections between school, community and homes are an integral part of social life. While the main role of the primary school is educational, its active involvement with the other two key participants of the social system may favourably enhance the shaping of the child's personality. This article combines a review of the school's didactic function with an analysis of some aspects of its cooperative engagement with the local community, ie. the intended purpose, methods, forms, and the anticipated effects of such collaboration. The analysis is based on two rounds of research conducted in selected schools of the Tarnów county (in both urban and rural environments) in 2006/2007 and 2013. The last portion of the paper moves from the research to generalizations and a handful of practical conclusions. One notable general conclusion is that greater didactic cooperation tends to foster pupils' short term achievements rather than any long haul preparations for further education.